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Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center

November 9, 2011

The Turkish organization IHH provides humanitarian assistance to the famine-stricken regions of Somalia. In September its activists coordinated with Al-Shabaab, an organization affiliated with with the global jihad, without authorization from the Somali government, an example of IHH's dual nature as both a humanitarian and an extremist Islamist organization.



IHH reaches out to Somalia's "troubled regions" (IHH website, September 17, 2011).
The picture shows an IHH activist in the Al-Yasir relief camp,
which is controlled by the global jihad-affiliated Al-Shabaab

Background

1. Prominent in the the coalition which dispatches flotillas to the Gaza Strip is **the Turkish organization IHH**, İnsani Yardım Vakfı ("foundation for humanitarian assistance"). IHH is a radical Islamist organization, which maintains close connections with other anti-Israeli organizations around the globe to send flotillas and convoys to the Gaza Strip. IHH was the moving spirit behind the Mavi Marmara flotilla in May 2010, and its **operatives aboard the ship were the hard core which fought against the IDF soldiers**, supported by operatives from other radical Islamist Turkish organizations.

2. IHH is a **radical Islamist humanitarian assistance organization, anti-Israeli, anti-West and sometimes anti-Semitic** as well, as made clear by statements from its leader, Bülent Yildirim. The organization has a dual nature:

1) **It is a humanitarian organization, undertaking broad humanitarian activities in emergency-stricken areas around the globe, especially in Muslim communities.** They include the Gaza Strip, Somalia and Turkey itself (IHH recently sent teams to the area stricken by the earthquake in eastern Turkey). They bring tents, send shipments of food, run aid programs for orphans, provide medical assistance, run programs for vocational education, build mosques, etc.

2) **It is an Islamist organization** with a radical Islamist ideology. By participating in the flotillas and convoys sent to the Gaza Strip it supports Hamas, which has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union. In addition, in the past it provided support for global jihad networks and was involved in a proposed terrorist attack in the United States (the "millennium attack," a mass-casualty planned for Los Angeles International Airport on Christmas Day, 2000).¹ It was designated as a **terrorist organization** by Israel and Germany, and outlawed.

3. **IHH represents itself as a human rights organization dealing exclusively with humanitarian activities, and it customarily hides or denies its radical, Islamist, jihadist identity**, especially from the West. However, an examination of its activities during the 1990s and the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, an analysis of the declarations made by its leaders, its violent activity during the Mavi Marmara flotilla and the confrontation of its operatives with the Egyptian security forces when prevented from entering the Gaza Strip – **all indicate its violent, jihadist nature and its hostility to Israel, the Jewish people and the Western world in general.**

¹For IHH's radical Islamist ideological and its former links to the Golan Heights, see **Appendix A**. The United States deliberated including it in the list of designated terrorist organizations and did not decide to include it.

IHH activity in Somalia – Update

4. Interviewed by Turkish TV, IHH leader Bülent Yildirim spoke of **the organization's activity in Somalia and of the wider context in which he regards that activity** (Turkish TV, Channel 7, September 23, 2011)²:

1) Since its founding, he said, IHH has taken upon itself to go to every location around the world where there is fighting.

2) The Mavi Marmara affair was not the first attempt made by IHH to "break a siege." For example, he said, **in Bosnia IHH "was the first to break the siege**, after 1,000 days...There as well our members were killed...**we were [also] the first organization which managed to enter east Turkistan to bring aid."**⁴

3) **IHH, he said, was using the same system in Somalia. No one dared enter the area controlled by Al-Shabaab. When IHH operatives arrived, they were shot at.**

5. **IHH does in fact conduct broad humanitarian assistance programs in Somalia and provides aid for the victims of the drought and famine ravaging the country.** Its activity in Somalia is coordinated with a Somalian charitable society called the Zamzam Foundation (named for a sacred well in Mecca). In our assessment, as part of its humanitarian activities, supported by the Turkish government,⁵ IHH sent a ship called the **Gazze** to Mogadishu with humanitarian assistance, and announced its intention of sending the **Mavi Marmara** as well, on which IHH operatives attacked IDF soldiers in May 2010.⁶

²According to the Turkish website Ilamigundem.com.

³IHH was established in Germany in 1992 **to respond to the war in Bosnia** and at its inception was radical Islamist and jihadist. Its operatives maintained contact with global jihad networks, especially those operating in **Bosnia and Chechnya**.

⁴He apparently referred to **the Muslim population living in China**. Bülent Yildirim accused China of killing Muslims in "north Turkistan." (For further information see the September 5, 2010 bulletin "In a speech given by IHH leader Bulent Yildirim two months prior to the Marmara flotilla, he presented a radical Islamic ideology with anti-Western and anti-Israeli motifs" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e123.pdf.)

⁵Turkish prime minister Erdogan, speaking in New York, praised the role of Turkey in providing aid to Somalia and was sharply critical of the UN's inability to extend support (Zaman.com.tr website, September 25, 2011).

⁶<http://www.ihh.org.tr/gazze-gemisi-somali-ye-ulasti/en/>; <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3174/ihh-delivers-aid-to-somali-terrorist-group>.



Picture from the Zamzam Foundation website

6. As part of its humanitarian activities in Somalia, **IHH also operates, admitted Bülent Yıldırım, in areas controlled by Al-Shabaab**, which has links to Al-Qaeda. In our assessment, Al-Shabaab allows IHH to operate **because of its radical Islamist ideology and because in the past IHH had links to global jihad networks**. Al-Shabaab, which seeks to overthrow the Somali government, is **designated as a terrorist organization by the United States**. Some of its operatives were apparently **trained by Al-Qaeda and fought in its ranks in Afghanistan**.

7. It was reported that **on September 12, 2011, the Somali authorities detained two Turkish activists, one of them belonging to IHH**. They had gone to the **Al-Yasir relief camp without first having received government authorization**. The camp is located about 50 kilometers (31 miles) from Mogadishu in **a region controlled by Al-Shabaab**. The two activists were part of a group of nine (three from IHH and six local residents) who went to the relief camp with food and humanitarian assistance.

8. The American IPT and Turkish IHH websites reported **that it was the first aid group to enter the region controlled by Al-Shabaab, which had banned aid agencies from operating in areas they controlled**. Reportedly, the group was warmly received by Al-Shabaab operatives. An **IHH operative (who remained anonymous) said that the IHH team would continue to provide humanitarian assistance to regions controlled by Al-Shabaab**.⁷

9. Eventually the **Somali authorities released the two Turkish activists** after contacts had been organized between the Turkish ambassador in Somalia and the Somali president, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, and the head of Somali intelligence. The humanitarian assistance coordinator of the Somali government told a Reuters' correspondent that **"The Turkish aid workers were arrested because they did not coordinate with out national security**. They met with **al-Shabaab without clearance or approval from government security...**"⁸ (ITIC emphasis).

7 The Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) is the website of a non-profit research group which maintains a comprehensive data center on radical Islamic terrorist groups. <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3174/ihh-delivers-aid-to-somali-terrorist-group>

8 IPT website.

10. IHH apparently **operates in other areas controlled by Al-Shabaab**. Murat Kabardan, Bülent Yildirim's deputy, said that the organization intended to bring assistance to a region controlled by Al-Shabaab using a vessel that was supposed to be sent to the port of **Kismayo**. **The port is controlled by Al-Shabaab and is an important economic asset for the organization.**⁹ The port was recently attacked from the air, after reports that on October 28, Al-Shabaab had decided to close it.¹⁰



The port of Kismayo in south Somalia (Al-Jazeera TV, December 21, 2008).



Unloading merchandise in the port of Kismayo (CIA website).

11. The affair illustrates IHH's **dual nature**. On the one hand, it is a humanitarian organization whose activity in Somalia is part of its broader activities in distressed areas around the globe, where it provides humanitarian assistance, mainly for Muslim communities. **On the other, it is a radical Islamist organization, anti-West and anti-Israeli, which supports Hamas and in the past supported global jihad networks.** Its radical Islamist ideology facilitates its operation in areas controlled by terrorist organizations affiliated with the global jihad. In the case of Somalia, its activities subvert the local authority and violate local law.

12. For additional information about IHH's radical Islamist nature and its ties to the global jihad, see the Appendix.

9 Af.reuters.com website.

10 Somaliareport.com website.

Appendix

IHH as an Islamist, Jihadist Organization with Ties to the Global Jihad

Overview

1. IHH is a **radical-Islamist Turkish organization which is an member of the international coalition waging the campaign to delegitimize Israel**, which is led to a great extent by organizations and activists affiliated with radical Islam. The organization played an important role in the flotilla which ended with the violent confrontation aboard the Mavi Marmara (May 2010). Half a year before the flotilla, IHH operatives participated in the British convoy to the Gaza Strip led by George Galloway, which ended in **a violent confrontation with the Egyptian security forces**. IHH was also supposed to participate in the international flotilla to the Gaza Strip planned for June 2011 but cancelled its participation because of internal Turkish political considerations. IHH is still involved in the project of the global anti-Israeli networks to send ships to the Gaza Strip, part of the international coalition initiative which is based on the cooperation between radical Islamist and radical leftist organizations.

2. IHH's dual nature:

1) **The humanitarian aspect:** IHH is an organization which conducts broad, legitimate humanitarian activities in distressed areas around the world. It sends shipments of food, conducts programs for orphans, deals with education, provides medical aid and helps build mosques. It operates primarily (but not entirely) in areas with Muslim communities and specializes in supporting Muslims in regions where disaster has struck.

2) **The Islamist aspect:** IHH has an **Islamist, anti-West, anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic ideology**, and in the past supported global jihad networks and was even involved in a terrorist attack planned for the United States (the Millennium Attack at Los Angeles International Airport, 2000). In recent years it has supported Hamas (designated by Israel, the United States and the European Union as a terrorist organization) with which it shares a similar radical Muslim Brotherhood-based Islamist ideology.

Ideology

3. IHH's ideology is radical Sunni Islamist, **anti-West and anti-Israeli, close to that of the Muslim Brotherhood** (Hamas' parent movement). It is based on the world view of **the central spiritual order of the Sufi trend of Sunni Islamic called Naqshbandi**. The order is influential in Turkey, having more than two million followers, among them high-ranking members of the government and the ruling AKP party.

4. The IHH worldview was illustrated in a speech given by Bülent Yildirim on March 31, 2010, two months before the Mavi Marmara flotilla, to large audience in Istanbul. **He expounded his radical Islamist ideology, the main points of which were the following:**

1) **The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Israeli-Hamas conflict** are part of a broader, worldwide conflict in which imperialistic and colonial forces kill and oppress Muslims all over the globe.

2) **Israel brutalizes Muslims**, an example of which is the way it forced a million [sic] people out of their homes in Operation Cast Lead. Israel is ruled by "extremists" and its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is a "psychopath."

3) **The Muslim world must unite**. "Once those who oppose us are out of our way, we will become the population with the greatest religious power."

4) **Control of Al-Aqsa mosque, and of Jerusalem in general, is very important**. "If Jerusalem is in Muslim hands, the whole world will be in Muslim hands."

5) **Muslims must oppose the "attack" being waged against them** in various parts of the world by the United States, NATO, China, Israel, India, etc. "**Palestine**," according to Yildirim, is part of a broader picture of the struggle waged by the enemies of Islam in Iraq, Afghanistan and Chechnya.

6) **The flotilla to the Gaza Strip is part of a comprehensive campaign whose objective is "to isolate Israel."** According to Yildirim, "we have won as soon as the flotilla is launched," and Israel will lose Turkey and Jordan, and be left without friends in the region.

Former IHH Ties to the Global Jihad

5. IHH was established in Germany in 1992 in response to the war in **Bosnia**. It was founded by the national Turkish religious movement Mili Gorus (MGIT), affiliated with with the extremist Islamic Saadet party.

6. Initially, IHH was completely extremist, Islamist and jihadist. Reliable information indicates that during the 1990s and early years of the 21st century, IHH operatives were linked to global jihad elements, **especially in Bosnia and Chechnya**.

7. Generally speaking, **IHH gave global jihad operatives logistic support and transferred funds for operatives in various countries, but also conducted operative missions:**

1) **IHH had direct links with Al-Qaeda** and recruited operatives for various jihad arenas.

2) **IHH had direct links with operatives in the Chechen arena**, including close personal relations between IHH leader Bülent Yildirim and Shamil Basayev, one of the Chechen leaders. **IHH also aided Chechen operatives by transferring funds** and by laundering money from Saudi Arabia, and served as a pathway for indirect contacts between the Chechens and **the Al-Qaeda leadership**.

3) **IHH helped bring fighters to Bosnia in the 1990s.** As part of the assistance the organization gave to jihad fighters, it financed their medical treatment and provided them with safe houses when they passed through Turkey on their way to Bosnia.

4) **IHH gave logistic support to global jihad operatives in Uzbekistan belonging to the Islamic Muslim Union (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU),** two global jihad-affiliated organizations operating from safe havens along the Pakistan border.

8. **Some of the above information was made public** in a study done in 2006 by the **Danish Institute for International Studies.** The study, conducted by Evan Kohlmann (a former FBI expert),¹¹ found that IHH had formerly had ties to Al-Qaeda and global jihad operatives.

9. According to the study, the Turkish authorities investigated IHH at least at the beginning of 1997 following information that high-ranking IHH figures had purchased weapons from radical Islamic organizations. **Based on the findings of the investigation, the Turkish security forces raided the IHH office in Istanbul and detained IHH activists. They uncovered weapons, explosives, instructions for making IEDs and a flag with a jihad slogan.** An analysis of the documents found in the office showed that IHH operatives were planning to participate in **jihad activities in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya.**

10. **IHH was mentioned in the trial of an Al-Qaeda operative named Ahmed Ressam, tried in 2000 in the United States for his involvement in the Millennium Bomb plot.** Ressam, a high-ranking Al-Qaeda operative based in Canada, **entered the United States at the end of 1999 with 600 kilograms (1320 pounds) of explosives.** He was head of a cell planning a **mass-casualty attack at Los Angeles International Airport** at the beginning of 2000. The US Federal prosecutors asked Jean-Louis Bruguière, head of the French anti-terrorist unit, who had been monitoring IHH, to testify as an expert witness. His testimony exposed the identity of IHH as affiliated with Al-Qaeda, through which Al-Qaeda had acquired forged documents, recruited operatives and transferred weapons.¹²

11 Evan Kohlmann worked for the FBI and other American administration organizations and specializes in the involvement of Islamic charitable societies in supporting terrorism.

12 For further information see the June 3, 2010 bulletin "Past Involvement of IHH in Supporting the Global Jihad and Radical Islam " at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/gj_e007.pdf,

1 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
2 WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
3 ---
4 HONORABLE JOHN C. COUGHENOUR, JUDGE PRESIDING
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7 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)
8 PLAINTIFF,)
9) CASE NO.
10 VS.) CR 99-666-JCC
11 AHMED RESSAM, AKA BENNI NORRIS,)
12 DEFENDANT.)
13 -----
14
15
16 REPORTER'S TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS
17 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
18 MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2001
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21
22 LAURA MILLER ELIAS, CBR 10019
23 BETH ZACCARO, CBR
24 UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE
25 312 NORTH SPRING STREET
26 ROOM 432
27 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
28 (213) 620-0890



The American case against Ahmed Ressam, page 1¹

Ahmed Ressam, head of the cell which planned the Millennium Bombing in Los Angeles (Photo from FBI History, June 3, 2010).

11. The following is an excerpt from the transcript of the Bruguière's testimony at the trial, pages 11-12, and 25 (ITIC emphasis throughout):

- **Question:** What role, if any, did the organization called IHH play in the operation of the Montreal cell?
- **Answer:** An important role. **The IHH is an NGO, but it was kind of a type of cover-up to thwart the Moujadin [jihad operatives].** At the same time, in order to obtain **forged documents** and also to obtain different forms of infiltration for Moujadin in combat. And also to go and gather these Moujadines. And finally, one of the last responsibilities that they had was also to be implicated or involved in weapons trafficking.
- **Q:** How does this relate to the Montreal cell, if it does?
- **A:** The link is actually related. There's a rather close relation. It was determined that [an operative named] Khabu, as you already know, had left for Canada in order to find forged -- to seek forged passports. And **he actually carried these forged documents to the IHH** namely for another member as well. In addition...there were actually different [telephone] calls [made by Khabu] that crossed **between Canada and Turkey and Istanbul where IHH is located.**
- **Q:** ..You indicated in one of your previous answers that you 14 considered Adel Boumezbeur's address to be a conspiratorial 15 flat. What brought you to that conclusion?

- **A:** ...[I]t seems that from this very apartment there were a lot of telephone calls carried out and made to all sorts of countries. Particularly, **Turkey and Istanbul and I'm talking about the IHH.**

11. **Note:** On August 20, 2010, the Turkish daily *Hürriyet* revealed that an operative named ***Erdinç Tekir***, who had been wounded aboard the **Mavi Marmara**, had **participated** – and been wounded – **in the hijacking of the Russian ferry *Avrasya* in the Black Sea in 1996**. The ferry was hijacked by a group of extremist Islamist Abkhasian-Caucasian gunmen who enjoyed the support of Turkish islamists. Tekir was sentenced to nine years for his part in the hijacking but released after three and a half, and **joined the Mavi Marmara flotilla to the Gaza Strip as an IHH operative.**

Denouncing the United States for Assassinating Osama bin Laden

12. On May 5, 2011, a number of radical Islamic organizations met at the Resadiye Hotel in the Ratih suburb of Istanbul and held a press conference where they **issued a joint statement denouncing the so-called American "terrorist attack" against Osama bin Laden**.¹³ Among the organizations were **IHH and Mazlumder, a Turkish Islamist organization which operated with IHH on the Mavi Marmara flotilla**.¹⁴ The statement also **denounced Turkish public figures, among them Abdullah Gul, the Turkish president, for having justified the American attack on Osama bin Laden**.¹⁵

13. After issuing the joint statement, representatives of the various Islamist organizations gave speeches. Among them was IHH representative **Osman Atalay**, an IHH public relations activist, who had also participated in the Mavi Marmara flotilla. He strongly attacked the United States and accused it of killing thousands of Iraqi and Afghan civilians. He also claimed that the United States had killed a million people in Iraq and that had violated international law. He said that **Osama bin Laden's assassination had been illegal and that what he called "American terrorism" should be denounced.**

¹³Velfecr.com website.

¹⁴Mazlumder (The organization for Human Rights and Solidarity with the Oppressed) was established in 1991 and was **considered the strongest and best-organized human rights organization in Turkey**. In Turkey it was **thought to be a front for an extremist Muslim organization**. Under the previous Turkish government it was subject to surveillance and searches, its branches were closed and it was prosecuted by the Turkish attorney general's office. Five of its members were aboard the *Mavi Marmara*.

¹⁵Turkish President Abdullah Gul, during a visit to Salzburg, Austria, praised the killing of *Osama bin Laden*, saying that his death should serve as a warning to terrorist leaders everywhere. He said that Muslims living in the West suffered from the concept which developed after the events of September 11 according to which Islam nurtured terrorism. Terrorism, he said, was not beneficial for Muslims, rather, it meant great losses for them and isolation in the societies in which they live.



The press conference called by the Turkish Islamist organizations at the Resadiye hotel in Istanbul. The banner hung on the stage reads "We censure American terrorism." Third from the left is IHH representative Osman Atalay (Photo from the velfecr.com website).

Bülent Yıldırım Responds to the Possibility of IHH's Being Designated by the United States as a Terrorist Organization

14. On November 14, 2010, the **Turkish daily newspaper Star** printed an interview with IHH leader Bülent Yıldırım conducted by Fadime Özkan'a. It focused on the events aboard the *Mavi Marmara* and later developments. The interview was prefaced with the note that it had been held in view of the **possibility that IHH would be designated by the United States as a terrorist organization as a consequence of the *Mavi Marmara* affair, and the expectation that Israel would present the findings of its internal investigation to the UN committee (i.e., the Palmer Committee, which in the meantime has issued its findings).**

Bülent Yıldırım, Star gazetesine İHH'yı anlattı

İHH İnsani Yardım Vakfı Başkanı Bülent Yıldırım, Star gazetesinden Fadime Özkan'a verdiği röportajda Mavi Marmara olayı ile ilgili bütün tartışmalı konulara açıklık getirdi. İşte o röportaj:

Amerikan Kongresi'ni şu günlerde meşgul eden konulardan biri 87 senatörün imzasıyla gündeme getirilen ve İHH'nin "terör örgütü" listesine alınmasını talep eden bir tasarı, 31 Mayıs'ta Gazze'ye insani yardım götüren çok uluslu Mavi Marmara gemisine uluslararası karasularda saldırarak 9 sivil Türkiye vatandaşını öldüren İsrail'i haklı çıkarmak. Yahudi lobileri yine iş başında yani. Öte yandan İsrail'in kendi içinde yaptığı soruşturma raporunu da bugünlerde BM'ye teslim etmesi gerekiyor. Bu iki sebeple İHH Başkanı Bülent Yıldırım'ın kapısını çaldım ve sordum:



14.11.2010 - Bülent Yıldırım, Star gazetesine İHH'yi anlattı

Tasarıya karşı ne yaparsunuz, tasarının iddialarının temel argümanlarının

Bülent Yıldırım interviewed by the Turkish daily Star

15. The interviewer asked Yıldırım to discuss the proposal made in the American Congress that İHH be designated as a terrorist organization. He answered at length, **focusing on the anti-Semitic claim that the United States was "ruled by Zionists."**¹⁶

16. The main points of the interview were the following:¹⁷

1) The motion to designate the İHH as a terrorist organization was born following the Mavi Marmara incident and **was the initiative of Jewish Congressmen. It demonstrates just how much influence Jews have on life in the U.S. and to what extent they have been able to enslave that country.** Collecting signatures in the Congress to submit the motion demonstrates better than anything else **"the dirty face" of the Congress.** According to Yıldırım, if the initiative is passed, it would expose **"the dirty face of the Zionists in the U.S."**

¹⁶Anti-Semitism in the Arab-Muslim world usually centers on Israel as a Jewish-Zionist country and as a concrete enemy, and on the Jewish people, seen as supporting Israel. **In many instances no distinction is made between vicious criticism of Israel and the Zionist movement, and the Jewish people.**

¹⁷For further information about the interview see the December 6, 2010 bulletin "İHH leader Bulent Yıldırım gave an interview focusing on the U.S. intention to designate the İHH as a terrorist organization and on the Mavi Marmara incident at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e147.pdf.

2) Bulent Yildirim noted that the Zionists are fond of saying, "Give us the money of any country, and we will make sure to pass any laws we see fit, **thus running that country.**" He added that, under the system used in the U.S., "**The funds which the Zionists provide allow the election of the senators and the ministers.**" President Obama is concerned about that phenomenon; consequently, the U.S., in its UN votes, "has positioned itself with the occupying, unjust, and dishonest Zionists." He further added, "**Therefore, Obama, during his term, can allow himself to be enslaved by the Zionists.**"

3) **The IHH will not cooperate with the American Congress.** "Ours is the right way. The whole world knows we are right." According to Yildirim, **the Zionists have lost some of their power in the United States**, while the Muslims there, despite the hardship and torture they undergo, represent Islam in a respectable manner. Israeli-influenced American media has taken Israel's side as usual. However, "Alternative U.S. media has gained a kind of power it never had before." He also said that the human rights organizations, whose numbers were increasing daily, were able to deal with the Israeli manipulations.

4) Bulent Yildirim was then asked by the reporter about the measures he deemed necessary to deal with the "world media", which also supported Israel and slammed the IHH. **His response to that question was also exploited for anti-Semitic incitement:** according to Yildirim, the "Zionism" **rules the world in four spheres:** the drug industry, the food industry, the weapons industry, and the media. The media provides considerable power to the spheres of fuel, finance, and weapons. **That is the foundation used by the Zionists to "handle world media,"** adding that "The Zionists acquire media across the globe."